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PACIFIC REGIONAL SEMINAR ON DECOLONIZATION DISCUSSES 'SUSTAINED AUTONOMY', SITUATIONS IN NEW CALEDONIA, PALAU, AMERICAN SAMOA AND EAST TIMOR

(Received from a UN Information Officer.)

PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea, 9 June -- The Pacific Regional Seminar on Decolonization, organized by the Special Committee on Decolonization, this morning discussed a paper presented yesterday by Alison Quentin-Baxter of the New Zealand Law Commission on a model form of association, called "sustained autonomy", between former administering Powers and former colonies.

The meeting was also addressed by Victorio Uherbelau on the situation in Palau, Yann Uregei of the Congress Populaire of New Caledonia, Rui Avila of Portugal on East Timor, Matthew Parep of the Papua New Guinea National Union of Students, Peter Tali Coleman, former Governor of American Samoa and Brian Brunton of the Individual and Community Rights Advisory Forum (Papua New Guinea).

At the outset of today's session, the Chairman, Renagi Renagi Lohia (Papua New Guinea) called for questions relating to yesterday's statements.

Amor Ardhaoui (Tunisia) requested that the paper delivered yesterday by Ms. Quentin-Baxter on "sustained autonomy" be provided to Committee members in their working languages to allow them to give it fuller consideration upon their return to United Nations Headquarters.

Statements

CARLYLE CORBIN, Chairman of the Non-Self-Governing Territories of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee, expressed some reservations about Ms. Quentin-Baxter's paper. He suggested that "sustained autonomy" could foster a relationship of economic and political dependency that might not be in keeping with encouraging the independence of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

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He said that any referendum on the status of New Caledonia should be conducted among the Kanak people, not the population at large, which was not representative of the colonized people. The Kanak people should be recognized as the legitimate people of the territory, and they demanded the right to immediate sovereignty.

MATTHEW PAREP, of the National Union of Students of Papua New Guinea, spoke about the struggle of the indigenous people of the Pacific region who were still under colonial rule to be accorded their inalienable right to self-determination. He requested that a special independent committee from the Pacific Island countries be set up to closely monitor the progress of the Matignon Accords and to coordinate the 1998 referendum.

RUI AVILA (Portugal) said his country addressed the seminar as the administering Power of the Non-Self Governing Territory of East Timor, as recognized by the United Nations and the international community. He expressed appreciation for the work of the Special Committee, and recalled Portugal's participation in the earlier regional seminar held in 1990 in Vanuatu, which coincided with the thirtieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

He expressed regret at the failure of attempts to finalize the decolonization of East Timor in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the Declaration and other relevant United Nations resolutions. Military conquest was no longer an acceptable way of acquiring possession of a Territory, he said, and the international community must strongly condemn situations where force was used to gain territory.

He went on to say that Portugal was firmly committed to work with the United Nations Secretary-General and the international community to ensure East Timorese the right to self-determination. "The Timorese plight deserves the attention and good offices of each and every one of us", he concluded.

PETER TALI COLEMAN, former Governor of American Samoa, echoed other speakers' support for the work of the Special Committee and said the presence of Mr. Lohia, a "son of Papua New Guinea", as Chairman was a measure of its past successes.

He said self-government had played a significant role in the development of the peoples of the South Pacific. While American Samoa was not currently seeking independence, he assured the Special Committee that his people supported the efforts of their neighbours for changes in their status, and that they could still be inspired by the aspiration of all people to be free and to exercise their inalienable rights. Furthermore, the existence of the Special Committee gave American Samoans "a special ear to listen" when any problems with the administering Power arose.

He affirmed the satisfaction of American Samoans with the general nature of their agreement with the administering Power (the United United States), but suggested that the Territory sought greater capacity to participate in regional organizations and treaties, and to receive foreign aid. In

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INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS, EAST TIMOR, GUAM, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ISSUES DISCUSSED BY PACIFIC REGIONAL SEMINAR ON DECOLONIZATION

(Received from a UN Information Officer.)

PORT MORESBY, 9 June -- A paper on the special rights and problems of indigenous peoples was presented to the Regional Seminar on Decolonization this afternoon. The meeting also heard speakers on the political situation in East Timor and on land rights in Guam, before giving its attention to economic and social issues.

The Committee heard presentations on economic development in Palau and the Northern Mariana Islands, on the effects of tourism on small island States and territories, on socio-economic development in the Non-Self-Governing Territories of the South Pacific, and on human resource development and the environment in New Caledonia

Statements

NAO BADU, of the University of Papua New Guinea, commenced his presentation on the problems of indigenous peoples to the Seminar by affirming that the Special Committee on Decolonization had a task which was "daunting and yet absolutely necessary" for peoples who were not receiving political, economic or social justice.

He spoke of specific problems of indigenous peoples and stressed the importance of land to the cultures of indigenous peoples, both as a means of sustenance and as something with which they had a symbiotic relationship. He said that this was the right time, in the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples, to address those problems.

He proposed that the United Nations be empowered to act quickly and decisively on such matters, and that bold leadership be exercised to follow up the numerous resolutions that were passed in the General Assembly but were not acted upon.

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JOSE GUSMAO, of the National Council for Maubere Resistance of East Timor, said that the question of the status of East Timor was the responsibility of the international community and a question of international law.

He gave an account of the recent trial by Indonesian authorities of Council leader Xanana Gusmao, and of the annexation of East Timor by Indonesia. He stated that Xanana Gusmao was ready to participate in negotiations on the future of East Timor "at any time, in any place", and reiterated the three-phase peace plan for East Timor that was proposed by the National Council and presented to the European Community in April 1992.

HADI WAYARABI (Indonesia) stated that misinformation had muddled the issues on East Timor. The East Timorese people had chosen to be independent as part of Indonesia, and their welfare had been an important priority of the Indonesian Government.

He rejected the account of Xanana Gusmao's trial offered by Jose Gusmao and stated that Xanana Gusmao had been found guilty under the Indonesian criminal code.

RUI AVILA (Portugal) responded that no act of self-determination by the East Timorese has been recognized by the United Nations, and that their right to self-determination had been reaffirmed by the General Assembly.

He repeated his earlier statement that Portugal, as administering Power, remained fully committed to working with the Secretary-General to address the situation in East Timor, and that the issue of self-determination for the Territory was not a bilateral, but an international issue.

On the question of East Timor, the Chairman of the Special Committee, RENAGI RENAGI LOHIA (Papua New Guinea), explained that the issue had been deferred from the agenda of the General Assembly pending the exercise of the good offices of the Secretary-General, who was seeking a framework for a solution in consultation with Portugal and Indonesia.

ANDREW BANGALI (Sierra Leone) posed several questions, including one on the level of political education of American Samoans. Earlier in the Seminar, the representative of American Samoa had suggested that his people had only minor reservations about their compact of association, and Mr. Bangali asked if the people outside the political process in American Samoa were aware of the options open to them. PETER TALI COLEMAN, former Governor of American Samoa, answered that the media and education process in American Samoa provided information on politics.

RON RIVERA, of the Organization of People for Indigenous Rights of Guam, expressed his support for Mr. Badu's statements about the importance of land for indigenous peoples, citing the problems of the Chamorro people of Guam as an example. He requested the Special Committee to again address the issue of land on Guam.

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